

'Going into the unknown'. Coffee Morning. 4 January 2012.

I can't remember the background, but about a month ago I came across a set of questions asked about traffic speed cameras. One motorist asked whether it is possible to drive so fast as to 'outrun the speed camera?' To which the Motor Lawyer answered, 'Yes, but speed cameras work up to around 300mph so unless you are driving a jet-powered car the answer is no'.¹

By coincidence, within a few days Linda and I sat down to watch a video we had bought some time before in a charity shop about the life of Donald Campbell, the only person ever to set both land and water speed records in the same year. We learned that Mr Campbell set a total of seven world water speed records – the last being on last day of 1964, when he reached a speed of over 276mph.

The date today is the 4th of January, and it was on the 4th of January in 1967 – 45 years ago – that Mr Campbell set out on Coniston Water in the Lake District with the *stated* intention of pushing the record to at least 300mph ... the very speed which Linda and I had heard about only days before in connection with traffic speed cameras. Sadly, Donald Campbell died in his attempt to break his own world water speed record when Bluebird K7 flipped and disintegrated at a speed in excess of 300mph.²

I was struck by the words of the Chief Observer for the event, and himself the holder of five water speed records,³ "I think conditions were as perfect as I have seen them on Coniston, but Donald was going into the unknown and he was well aware of the risks".

I want us to think for a few moments of those words, 'going into the unknown'. Because, as we enter another New Year, we are each doing just that ... 'going into the unknown'. I suppose that some will recall the words quoted by King George VI just three months after the outbreak of the Second World War – words to which I referred here twelve months ago ... 'I said to the man who stood at the Gate of the Year, 'Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown'. And he replied, 'Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That will be better to you than light, and safer than a known way'. Twelve months ago I took my text from chapter 41 of the prophecy of Isaiah, 'I the Lord your God will hold your right hand, saying to you, Fear not; I will help you'.⁴ And His promise holds as true for 2012 as it did for 2011.

A few years ago, I mentioned a well-known singer, song-writer and radio celebrity in Hollywood back in the 1940s by name Stuart Hamblen. He numbered John Wayne among his close friends and was noted for his drinking, gambling, and womanizing. But Stuart Hamblen was converted to Christ following hearing Billy Graham preaching in a marquee.⁵ And following his conversion Mr Hamblen wrote many gospel songs, one of the more famous was titled, 'Known only to Him', and includes the words, 'I'll fear not the darkness when my flame shall dim. I know not what the future holds but I know who holds the future. It's a secret known only to Him'.⁶

And what a thrill it is – as we enter 2012 – for each Christian to share Stuart Hamblen's confidence ... 'I know not what the future holds but *I know* who holds the future'.

But, if anything, it is an even greater thrill for each Christian to have the confidence that when the time comes for him or her to leave this world, he or she does not step – does not go – 'into the unknown'.

For, alas, that is just how many people do think of – and speak of – death ... as 'the great unknown'.

But for those who believe God's word, the Bible, death is anything but that. Because the Bible is clear on the matter. My death will mean my going either, in its own words, to 'be with Christ', in a place of bliss and glory ... or to a place of judgement – to a place of judgement which, I have to confess, by my actions and my thought-life, I well deserve.

I have been thinking much the past few days of the words of the apostle Paul, written shortly before his martyrdom at Rome ... 'I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him until that day'.⁷

For Paul, death was not 'the unknown', because, as far as he was concerned, the One to whom he had entrusted his soul, his salvation and his eternal happiness ... He (the Lord Jesus) was not unknown.

'I know Him', Paul says in effect, 'the One in whom I have placed my trust – my confidence ... and I am persuaded – I am assured – am utterly convinced ... that He is able – that He has the power – to keep secure – to keep in perfect safety – to guard as one would a valuable deposit ... that which I have entrusted to Him (namely, my eternal welfare) with a view to that day when I shall meet and face Him'.

It is in this very same letter – as far as we know, the last which Paul ever penned – that he wrote concerning 'the holy scriptures which are able to make you wise to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus'.

Back in 1847,⁸ a Scottish doctor, James Young Simpson (later Sir James Young Simpson), discovered the anaesthetic properties of chloroform.⁹ I have read that, when, almost 23 years later,¹⁰ Sir James was on his deathbed, a friend asked him, 'Sir, what are your speculations?' 'Speculations!', the good doctor replied, 'I have no speculations! For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him until that day'.¹¹

Much more recently – just two weeks this past Saturday – the Lord called home Doug Bick – who most, if not all, of you will remember. Yesterday, Nigel Williams, a long-standing friend of Doug's, told me that, when he saw Doug just before he died, Doug's very last words to him were, 'It will be a wonderful awakening in the morning'.

Both James Simpson and Doug Bick shared both the faith and the confidence of the apostle Paul. For both men could say with him, 'I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him until that day'.

Thinking again of the words of the Chief Observer at Coniston Water, death for Dr Simpson and Doug was certainly not a case of 'going into the unknown'. As for Paul, *death* was not 'the unknown' because the One to whom they had entrusted their souls, their salvation and their eternal happiness – *He* was not unknown.

With our eye on the coming year, can we each say with Stuart Hamblen, 'I know not what the future holds but *I know who holds the future*'?

And with our eye on the time when we must leave this world, can we each say with the apostle Paul, '*I know whom I have believed*, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him until that day'?

Footnotes

¹ See ... <http://www.confused.com/news-views/blogs/blog-can-you-fool-a-speed-camera>

² 'On 4 January 1967, Campbell was killed when Bluebird K7 flipped and disintegrated at a speed in excess of 300 mph (480 km/h).[6] Bluebird had completed a north-south run at an average of 297.6 mph (478.9 km/h), and a peak speed of 315 mph (507 km/h). Campbell used a new water brake to slow K7 from approximately 220 mph (350 km/h). Instead of refuelling and waiting for the wash of this run to completely subside, Campbell decided to make the return run immediately to beat it before it had been reflected back onto the course. This was a normal option that Campbell had available to him when operating Bluebird on high speed runs. The second run was even faster; as K7 passed the start of the measured kilometre, she was travelling at over 320 mph (510 km/h). However her stability had begun to break down as she travelled at speed she had never achieved before, and the front of the boat started to bounce out of the water on the starboard side. 600 yards from the end of the measured mile, K7 lifted from the surface and after about 1.5 seconds, gradually lifted from the water at an ever increasing angle, before she took off at a 90-degree to the water surface. She somersaulted and plunged back into the lake, nose first. The boat then cartwheeled across the water before coming to rest. The impact broke Bluebird forward of the air intakes where Campbell was sitting, killing him instantly; the main hull sank shortly afterwards.'

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donald_Campbell

³ Norman Buckley.

⁴ Isa. 41. 13.

⁵ See http://www.tangle.com/view_video.php?viewkey=ea3f443587dea07e3ccd

⁶ Stuart Hamblen recorded the song on 15 June 1952 ... eight and a half years before Elvis did: November 1960.

⁷ 2 Tim. 1. 12.

⁸ November 1847.

⁹ Chloroform itself was discovered over 10 years earlier.

¹⁰ 6 May 1870.

¹¹ See, e.g. ...

http://www.preceptaustin.org/2_timothy_112-14.htm; <http://dailyencouragement.wordpress.com/2011/02/18/what-i-have-committed/>

<http://sermons.logos.com/submissions/114265-Confidence-in-Jesus-Christ-Part-2-1-John-5b#content=/submissions/114265>

But then see concerning Michael Faraday ... <http://www.backtothebible.org/index.php/Gateway-to-Joy/Mentioning-Christ-in-Christmas.html> and <http://www.rocbattle.com/forums/archive/index.php/t-32368.html> ... And then contrast 'Michael Faraday, was asked on his deathbed by a reporter, "What are your speculations now?" Faraday said, "I have no speculations. My faith is firmly fixed in Christ my Savior who died for me, and who has made a way for me to go to heaven" in... <http://www.thruthebible.org/site/pp.aspx?c=irlMKXPGLsF&b=4380273&printmode=1>